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ABSTRACT

This market analysis summarizes recent research into Prince George's Community College's (PGCC) image as perceived by business leaders, high school students, and adult county residents at large. PGCC and its leadership are not widely known in the corporate community. Business leaders who are familiar with PGCC hold favorable views about the college. Most county high school seniors view PGCC positively. More county high school graduates attend PGCC than any other college. Adult residents of the county familiar with the college regard it favorably, particularly as a place to start college and as a place for the less advantaged to attend college. However, nearly three in five county adults are not familiar with PGCC. Though popular with county high school students, the community college is not the first place the business community thinks of when selecting workforce-training providers. And though county residents in general support the college--as evidenced by bond referenda, for example--most are unfamiliar with the college's programs and personnel. Those who know the college rate it highly, but many remain unaware of what it has to offer. (VWC)

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Community Perceptions of PGCC

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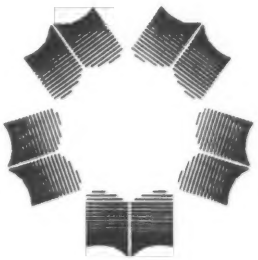

PRINCE GEORGE'S
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Office of Institutional Research and Analysis

Market Analysis MA98-4

October 1997

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PRINCE GEORGE'S COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Office of Institutional Research and Analysis

COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF PGCC
Market Analysis MA98-4
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Introduction

To support the college's Community Outreach strategic initiative, approved by the Board of Trustees October 9, 1997, the research office plans a series of reports examining the college's image in the community, analyzing the postsecondary education and training needs of the county, and assessing the effectiveness of college marketing tools. This market analysis summarizes recent research into the college's image as perceived by business leaders, high school students, and county residents at large.

Business Community Perceptions

Information about how the college is perceived by business leaders and county employers came from three sources: interviews conducted by a consultant assessing the feasibility of a PGCC major gifts campaign, a survey of organizations who had contracted with the college for workforce training, and surveys of employers of PGCC graduates. In addition, a statewide survey of employer opinions about the status of Maryland's workforce provided another source of business views on community colleges.

Clements Group Feasibility Study. During July 7-18, 1997, a consultant for the Clements Group interviewed 34 corporate, business, professional, and community leaders as part of a study to determine the college's readiness to launch a major gifts campaign. While most of the questions raised during these interviews concerned the proposed campaign--its financial and programmatic goals, schedule, leadership and organization--respondents were initially asked their attitudes toward PGCC and its Board of Trustees, administration, and faculty. Though the number of interviews completed (34) was modest, they represented community leaders of "influence and affluence" including 17 CEOs of prominent businesses operating in Prince George's County. Respondents expressing opinions about the college and its faculty, administration, and Board of Trustees were almost uniformly favorable in their comments. However, the feasibility study interviews revealed that substantial

proportions of the county's business leaders did not know enough about PGCC to have formed opinions about the college, its administration, the faculty, or the Board:

1. Seven of the 34 respondents--a fifth--had no opinion about the college.

2. Fifteen respondents, or nearly half, were not well enough acquainted with members of the administration to offer an opinion about their performance.

3. Similarly, fifteen respondents did not know enough about the college's faculty to have an opinion.

4. Twenty-one respondents, or three-fifths of those interviewed, did not know enough about members of the Board of Trustees to have an opinion about the Board.

In short, those who knew the college were favorable toward it but many county opinion leaders expressed a lack of knowledge of PGCC and its leadership. The Clements Group's specific recommendations directed the college to address the following concerns:

1. The need to *increase community awareness* of the benefits of PGCC, the limitations dictated by funding allocations, and the need for support from the private sector.

2. The need to *increase understanding among significant leaders in the college's service area* concerning the mission, role, and direction of PGCC as a resource to the community.

3. The need for administrators, Board of Trustees members, and others closely associated with PGCC to *become more visible and vocal* in their support of the college. [Italics added.]

The report further argued that "workforce training and retraining are the backbone of PGCC's partnership with the corporate community," and that the college should initiate "executive awareness sessions" with key community leaders to create a stronger awareness of college, its mission, and its needs.

Maryland Business Research Partnership Surveys. The Maryland Business Roundtable for Education, the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development, the Maryland Economic Development Commission, and the Maryland State Department of Education contracted with the University of Baltimore's Maryland Business Research Partnership (MBRP) to conduct two surveys of Maryland business leaders to collect perceptions about workforce conditions in Maryland. While most of the survey items concerned occupational demand and workplace skill needs, respondents

were asked to rate the effectiveness of the state's educational institutions in providing a skilled and educated workforce meeting the needs of their businesses. Maryland's business community gave the highest level of approval to the state's private and public four-year colleges and universities, which were rated as good or excellent by four-fifths of the respondents. Community colleges were rated good or excellent by 62 percent of the respondents, the same percentage earned by private high schools. Public high schools were rated as good or excellent by 32 percent and considered to be poor by 31 percent of the respondents. Individual colleges and schools were not rated.

Effectiveness in Providing a Workforce Meeting the Needs of Business
Maryland Business Research Partnership Survey, 1997
Percent of Firms, N=523

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Public high schools	3%	29%	37%	31%
Private high schools	11%	51%	27%	12%
Community colleges	10%	52%	30%	8%
Public universities	16%	64%	14%	5%
Private universities	23%	61%	10%	6%

The respondents to the MBRP surveys also indicated who they regularly used for workforce training. The most common providers of workforce training were in-house training departments, with over three-fourths of the businesses citing their use. Four-year colleges and universities were used by two-thirds of the responding businesses. Forty-three percent of the respondents reported using community colleges for workforce training. Twenty-three percent also cited the Advanced Technology Centers administered by the Maryland Higher Education Commission and the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development, but located at and operated by Maryland community colleges.

When asked what actions the state could take to improve the job skills of Maryland's workforce, 92 percent of the respondents suggested improving and expanding the technical training provided by community colleges. A similar proportion advocated improved technical training in high schools. Seventy-six percent of the respondents recommended increasing the number of graduates from the state university system in business, computer, and engineering programs.

Training Providers Regularly Used Percent of Respondents, N = 637	
Training Provider	Percent of Respondents
In-house training department	77%
Four-year colleges/universities	66%
Industry or trade association	59%
Outside consultants	55%
Community colleges	43%
Advanced Technology Centers	23%
Private career schools	8%

Maryland Community College Workforce Training Survey. During spring 1995 the Maryland Association of Deans and Directors of Continuing Education/Community Services conducted a survey of businesses and organizations that had received workforce training under contract with Maryland community colleges during 1993-94. In addition to a series of questions concerning workforce training needs, the survey asked the respondents to evaluate their satisfaction with the training provided by the community colleges. Statewide, 97 percent of the respondents said they were satisfied with the contract training provided by Maryland community colleges. All 14 of the responding PGCC contract training clients indicated satisfaction:

Satisfaction with Quality of Community College Training Contract Training Clients, 1993-94		
Level of Satisfaction	Statewide (N = 555)	Prince George's (N = 14)
Very satisfied	60%	64%
Satisfied	37%	36%
Uncertain	2%	0%
Unsatisfied	< 1%	0%
Very unsatisfied	< 1%	0%

In addition, all the recipients of PGCC contract training said they would recommend PGCC to others with similar training goals. Half said they would definitely use PGCC again to meet future training needs; the remaining half said they probably would.

Surveys of Employers of Graduates. Every other year, as part of a statewide follow-up survey of community college graduates, the Maryland Higher Education Commission coordinates a survey of employers of graduates. Employers are asked to rate several attributes of the graduate employees they supervise, including technical job skills, familiarity with equipment used on the job, oral and written communications skills, and ability to work in teams. The questionnaire also asks respondents to rate each graduate's overall preparation for employment. Because the MHEC survey is characterized by a number of methodological limitations, its findings must be interpreted with caution. Given this caveat, the survey has revealed consistent employer satisfaction with the job preparation of PGCC graduates. Survey after survey, nine out of ten employer respondents have rated the overall job preparation of PGCC graduates as very good or good. In most years, no employer has rated a PGCC graduate's preparation as less than fair--the midpoint on the five-point scale.

High School Student Perceptions

Each school year, representatives from the college's Office of Recruitment visit senior English classes in each county high school to make presentations about the college. Presentations during the 1995-96 school year included completion of a one-page survey by the high school seniors concerning their college plans, career interests, and awareness of PGCC programs. The questionnaire also asked the high school students to rate several characteristics of PGCC. A majority of respondents in 1995-96 gave positive ratings to PGCC's cost, quality of teaching, and overall reputation. Most also agreed that PGCC was a place "for people like me" to attend college.

High School Senior Ratings of PGCC
Recruitment Office Survey, 1995-96
(Five-point scale, N = 2,602)

Attribute	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor	Scale Mean
Cost	40%	38%	21%	1%	<1%	4.06
Quality of teaching	18%	61%	21%	<1%	<1%	3.95
As a place for me	25%	46%	23%	4%	2%	3.88
Overall reputation	16%	47%	31%	5%	2%	3.70

Enrollment behavior reflects these high ratings. More Prince George's County high school graduates go to PGCC than attend all four-year colleges and universities in Maryland combined. PGCC enrolls nearly three times as many high school graduates as the second-most popular institution, the University of Maryland, College Park.

General Public Perceptions

What do county residents in general think about the college? Countywide telephone surveys conducted in 1995 and 1997 provide some answers. Market share analysis of student enrollment choices is suggestive. Voter responses to bond authorization referenda supporting PGCC building projects also provide an indication of public support of the college.

Countywide Telephone Survey, Summer 1997, Preliminary Results. As a follow-up to a survey completed in 1995, a workgroup of the Marketing Council and the Office of Institutional Research and Analysis designed a countywide telephone poll which included some questions regarding PGCC's image. The Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Maryland, College Park was hired to do the telephone interviewing. At the time this market analysis was written in October 1997, the SRC had completed approximately half of the 400 interviews required by the research design and subsequent contract. Thus the findings reported here are preliminary.

The interview schedule asked respondents how familiar they were with Prince George's Community College. Less than half (43 percent) said they were very familiar or somewhat familiar with the college. The majority (57 percent) said they were not very familiar or not familiar at all with PGCC.

Familiarity with PGCC
Survey of County Residents, Summer 1997
N = 192

Extent of Familiarity	Percent
Very familiar	10%
Somewhat familiar	33%
Not very familiar	19%
Not familiar at all	38%

Respondents who expressed at least some familiarity with PGCC were asked to compare the college with other area colleges on several attributes. Interviewers asked respondents to indicate if PGCC was much above average, above average, average, below average, or much below average. Scale means on all attributes were above 3, indicating overall positive opinion toward the college. PGCC was most highly rated for its convenience of location and for being a place to begin higher education and as a higher education provider to less advantaged residents. Large pluralities also rated PGCC above average as a place to learn a career or trade (48 percent) and for its affordability (45 percent).

County Adult Resident Ratings of Selected PGCC Attributes
Countywide Telephone Survey, Summer 1997
Preliminary Findings, N=82

Attribute	Much Above	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Much Below	Scale Mean
Convenience of location	24%	29%	40%	6%	1%	3.68
Place to begin higher ed	9%	47%	38%	4%	1%	3.59
Provider to less advantaged	11%	46%	33%	7%	3%	3.56
Place to learn career/trade	9%	39%	45%	6%	1%	3.48
Affordability	13%	32%	47%	7%	1%	3.47
Having desired courses	10%	31%	51%	7%	1%	3.41
Convenience of scheduling	3%	40%	52%	6%	0%	3.40
Quality of teaching	4%	37%	52%	6%	1%	3.37
Campus security/safety	2%	26%	67%	2%	4%	3.20

Countywide Telephone Survey, Summer 1995. During 1995, the PGCC Marketing Council sponsored a telephone survey of county residents over age 18 to learn more about the postsecondary market in Prince George's County. The telephone interviewing was conducted by the University of Maryland, College Park's Survey Research Center. The survey included two questions to gauge the college's image in the county; the first asked respondents to rate PGCC's reputation, and the second, its cost. The county residents polled overwhelmingly held positive images of the college, with 95 percent rating the college's reputation as very good or good. The college's cost was also favorably perceived, with seven in ten respondents rating PGCC's cost positively. (A four-point scale with no neutral choice was used.)

Public Perceptions of PGCC's Reputation and Cost Countywide Telephone Survey, Summer 1995 (Four-point scale, N = 401)					
Attribute	Very Good	Good	Poor	Very Poor	Scale Mean
Reputation	40%	55%	5%	1%	3.33
Cost	7%	63%	25%	4%	2.73

The survey asked about recent college attendance. One-fourth of the county residents surveyed claimed to have enrolled in some form of postsecondary coursetaking during the prior two years. Nineteen respondents had taken one or more classes at PGCC. Eighty-two of the telephone survey respondents had taken a college-level course during the prior two years at an institution other than PGCC. A third of these students had considered PGCC before choosing a different provider; for the remaining two-thirds, PGCC was never considered. Respondents who had taken classes elsewhere were asked why they didn't choose PGCC. For half the sample, PGCC did not have the program or courses they wanted--in most cases, because they wanted courses beyond the associate degree level. For 13 percent, transportation was the major obstacle. PGCC's cost and quality were not issues.

Main Reason Attended College Other than PGCC Countywide Telephone Survey, Summer 1995 N = 82	
Reason Did Not Attend PGCC	Percent
Wanted bachelor's or advanced degree	28%
Did not have program/courses desired	21%
Inconvenient location/transportation problem	13%
Not a county resident at the time	11%
Liked other colleges better	10%
Didn't know [enough] about PGCC	6%
PGCC cost/other colleges provided aid	3%
Poor reputation/quality of PGCC	2%
Other reasons	6%

Capital Bond Referenda. During the college's history, the voters of Prince George's County have been asked to approve referenda authorizing the sale of bonds to support PGCC capital projects four times. The bonds have always been approved by wide margins. The most recent referendum, to authorize bonds for the college's science building, was supported by 72 percent of the county's voters in the November 1996 election.

Enrollment. Prince George's Community College is the most popular choice of Prince George's County residents for undergraduate education. PGCC enrolls nearly three times as many undergraduates as the University of Maryland, College Park, the second most popular institution. Forty-three percent of the county residents attending a Maryland college or university in fall 1996 attended PGCC. Three of every five county residents attending college part-time attended PGCC.

Summary

This review of research into PGCC's image can be summarized under the three market segments as follows:

Business Leaders. PGCC and its leadership are not widely known in the corporate community. Business leaders who are familiar with PGCC hold favorable views about the college.

High School Students. Most county high school seniors view PGCC positively. More county high school graduates attend PGCC than any other college.

County Adults. Adult residents of the county familiar with the college regard it favorably, particularly as a place to start college and as a place for the less advantaged to attend college. However, nearly three in five county adults are not familiar with PGCC.

Though popular with county high school students, the community college is not the first place the business community thinks of when selecting workforce training providers. And though county residents in general support the college--as evidenced by bond referenda, for example--most are unfamiliar with the college's programs and personnel. Those who know the college rate it highly, but many remain unaware of what it has to offer.

Craig A. Clagett
Director
Institutional Research and Analysis

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